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101420Z Jun 04

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 LAGOS 001205

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SUBJECT: AH, THE "O'S" - A VISIT TO OGUN, OYO, OSUN, AND ONDO STATES (PART 2 OF 4)

REF: LAGOS 1203

[1](#)1. Summary. This is the second of a four-part report on PolOffs' visit to four of the five former Alliance for Democracy Party (AD) States, that were taken by the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) in the 2003 and 2004 federal, state and local elections. (Part 1 at reftel) After one year under new administrations, all four States seem to be making progress in delivering critical government services such as free education, poverty alleviation and infrastructure improvements.

[1](#)2. (SBU) Oyo State, with the energetic leadership of businessman-turned-Governor Rashid Ladoja, is moving out of the doldrums and inactivity of the previous administration. Former Oyo Governor, Lam Adesina, while voicing the oft-heard list of complaints and gripes about the PDP victories in the 2003 and 2004 elections, still blustered that the AD is poised to make a strong comeback in Oyo in the 2007 election cycle. We doubt it. End summary.

[1](#)3. Oyo - "The Pacesetter State"

(SBU) Oyo State has existed in some form or other since pre-colonial days and was ruled by the traditional Alaafin of Oyo. At independence in 1960, the State became part of the now defunct Western State, and in 1991 acquired its current borders. Predominantly ethnic Yoruba, Oyo is also home to a minority mix of ethnic tribes from all parts of Nigeria. Oyo is the site of the prestigious and well-attended capital city University of Ibadan and the UN-sponsored International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA) program. Since our visit last year, the State has made progress maintaining and repairing infrastructure such as roads and electricity supply. Local officials readily admitted that the State is now more than 60% Muslim, and, as in the other three States we visited, our observations indicated a higher percentage. The Grand Mosque in Ibadan, with its huge gold dome, dominates the city skyline and commands visitors' attention more than any church steeple in the city.

Selfish Americans

[1](#)4. (SBU) Governor Rashid Adewolu Ladoja, a chemical engineer and successful millionaire businessman, impressed us as intelligent, candid and astute in his new career as a politician. He graciously dismissed the elaborate press conference he had arranged for our meeting and agreed to a private session with only a few of his cabinet in attendance. Ladoja started off the meeting by declaring that the US was "very selfish" in offering its assistance to Nigeria. He said that Nigeria, being a new democracy, had many domestic issues of concern that needed US assistance, but the US was interested in furthering only its own goals in the region. He mentioned specifically, debt relief for Nigeria and US membership in both the Paris and London Clubs. (Comment. PolOff responded to the Governor by pointing out that US Mission goals in Nigeria, such as promoting political and economic stability, are naturally in our self-interest. If our efforts and assistance produced a safe and secure Nigeria where US entities can operate, it was a "win-win" outcome for both nations. End comment.)

[1](#)5. (SBU) Ladoja turned quickly to local issues, saying that the PDP had won in Oyo State because the people of Oyo had been "hoodwinked" by the AD Party. The people of Oyo have been historically outside the mainstream of Nigerian politics, according to the Governor. They were convinced by the AD party that they did not need a federal government, and that their own AD/Afenifere/Yoruba politicians could do the right thing. "The PDP candidates were just better than the AD candidates. AD and Afenifere relaxed and that is why they lost." The Governor said he had nothing for the Christians in Oyo, and nothing for the Muslims either, but everything for the citizens of Oyo. "We are defining what government should be," he said. His administration is concentrating on diversification through agricultural development. Oyo has the largest area of arable land in Nigeria and is heavily into the federal government's subsidized fertilizer program.

The State has launched the Oyo State Agricultural Re-awakening Programme (AIRPOS) which provides seeds, tractors and insecticides to farmers willing to plant corn, melons and cassava. There are plans to revitalize Oyo's abandoned cocoa plantations, and the State government has begun to clear State-owned lands and offer one free acre to any cocoa farmer who already owns an acre under cultivation. Any university graduates specializing in agriculture will receive two acres free upon graduation.

Living in the present; preparing for the future

16. (SBU) As for the future, the Governor said that Oyo was not counting on windfall income from recent increases in the revenue from oil production. "We will not see anything from that for several months," he said. Oyo is concentrating, instead, on improving delivery of government services now. Ladoja said the State is going ahead with improvements to all roads, whether they are federal, state or local, without asking the federal government for up-front funding or reimbursement. To accomplish this, the State has bought and operates its own asphalt plant. Oyo has increased the delivery of potable water to urban and rural areas by 40%. All government printing is done in-house to save money. While education is still free at the primary level, the Ladoja administration is requiring parents to pay for all end-of-term exams. As for the 2007 elections, Ladoja says, "I have the job of running this State today. We are not yet campaigning -- maybe in October of 2006 we will begin. We are working hard now to show the people that we can do the job. We want your help, but we are realistic. We know you are selfish."

The sore loser rationalizes

17. (SBU) Late in the afternoon, we met with the AD former governor of Oyo State, Lam Adesina. Adesina was upbeat about the future of AD in Oyo and voiced the mantra we heard from other AD members. He said AD was "on the ground in Oyo and in firm control." Adesina also voiced some of the same complaints of other losers in the 2003 and 2004 elections. He charged that the people did not really get a chance to choose the government they wanted. "The PDP just wrote the results they wanted. We know we won in many of the local government areas, but PDP interfered with the elections process and threw out the results." Adesina wants the whole election mechanism disbanded and reformed. He wants the current registration lists, the system for selecting election officials, and the validation of results abandoned and replaced by systems not controlled by the majority PDP. Adesina said that AD still has enough stalwart members in Oyo to field candidates and win in 2007.

18. (SBU) The recent schism in the AD has been healed according to Adesina, and the party still has much support, not only in Oyo and the southwest, but nationwide. He says "nobody likes Governor Ladoja" and the Governor has to travel everywhere with bodyguards because he is afraid of attacks. The AD wants to create "true" federalism in Nigeria and this can only be achieved by calling a Sovereign National Conference to rewrite the Constitution that was imposed on the people by former military regimes.

HINSON-JONES